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## ... and Gates is out of it

Robert M. Gates' name was withdrawn from nomination as head of the CIA late yesterday. "It is apparent," Gates' letter to President Reagan said, "that there is strong sentiment in the Senate to await completion, at minimum, of the work of the Senate Select Committee on Iran before acting on my nomination." He was right.

Whether Gates' pulling himself out of contention was his own act, a White House order, or something in between, it was wise. The CIA must not be crippled by the politics of scandal and opportunity.

Howard Baker made the announcement—his first public act as White House chief of staff. He had interviewed Gates as one of his first non-public acts in his new job. Senate Republican Leader Bob Dole had said the confirmation would be difficult. That was no exaggeration.

Gates, 43, was in key CIA posts when weapons were shipped secretly to Iran and money apparently was diverted to Contra rebels in Nicaragua. Until February 1986, he was head of the CIA's analytical division, which performs research and produces intelligence reports. In Senate hearings on his nomination, one of the kindest interpretations is that he was less than firm, and probably less than professionally responsible, in standing up to improper Iran-Contra activities.

The CIA is a vital arm of government. Its capacity to carry on must not be crippled by politics. Pressing for Gates' confirmation would have done just that. Reagan—and Baker—did well to take him out of contention. They must now come up with a powerful, widely acceptable replacement.